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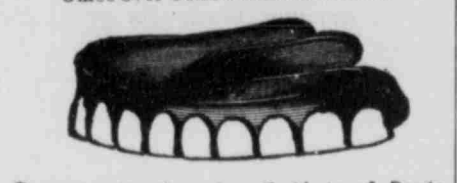
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L. D. KASTENBINE, M. D., Louisville College of Pharmacy.

MEAT & MALT CO., Louisville, Ky.

GRAUSTARK

By GEORGE BARR M'UTCHEON

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CHAPTER XVII.

IN THE TOWER.

THE two captives who were not prisoners so dazed by the unexpected events of the morning that they did not realize the vast seriousness of the situation for hours. Then it dawned upon them that appearances were really against them and that they were alone in a land far beyond the reach of help from home. One circumstance puzzled them with its damming mystery: How came the blood stains upon the doorknob? Dangloss courteously discussed this strange and unfortunate feature with them, but with ill concealed skepticism. It was evident that his mind was clear in regard to the whole affair.

Anguish was of the opinion that the real murderer had stained the knob intentionally, aiming to cast suspicion on the man who had been challenged. The assassin had an object in leaving those convicting finger marks where they would do the most damage. He either desired the arrest and death of the American or hoped that his own guilt might escape attention through the misleading evidence. Lorry held, from his deductions, that the crime had been committed by a fanatic who loved his sovereign too devotedly to see her wedded to Lorenz. Then why should he wantonly cast guilt upon the man who had been her protector, objected Dangloss.

The police guards came in from the hotel about 10 o'clock, bearing marks of an ugly conflict with the Axphainians. They reported that the avengers had been quelled for the time being, but that a deputation had already started for the castle to lay the matter before the princess. Officers had searched the rooms of the Americans for blood stains, but had found no sign of them.

"Did you find bloody water in which hands had been washed?" asked Anguish.

"No," responded one of the guards. "There was nothing to be found in the bowls and jars except soapy water. There is not a blood stain in the room, captain."

"That shakes your theory a little, eh?" cried Anguish triumphantly. "Examine Mr. Lorry's hands and see if there is blood upon them." Lorry's hands were white and uncontaminated. Dangloss wore a pucker on his brow.

Shortly afterward a crowd of Axphain men came to the prison gates and demanded the person of Grenfall Lorry, departing after an ugly show of force. Curious Edelweiss citizens stood afar off, watching the walls and windows eagerly.

"This may cost Edelweiss a great deal of trouble, gentlemen, but there is more happiness here this morning than the city has known in months. Everybody believes you killed him, Mr. Lorry, but they all love you for the deed," said Dangloss, returning at noon from a visit to the hotel and a ride through the streets. "The prince's friends have been at the castle since 9 o'clock, and I am of the opinion that they are having a hard time with the high priestess."

"God bless her!" cried Lorry.

"The town is crazy with excitement. Messengers have been sent to old Prince Bolaz to inform him of the murder and to urge him to hasten hither, where he may fully enjoy the vengeance that is to be worked upon his son's slayer. I have not seen a wilder time in Edelweiss since the close of the siege, fifteen years ago. By my soul, you are in a bad box, sir. They are lurking in every part of town to kill you if you attempt to leave the tower before the princess signs an order to restrain you legally. Your life outside these walls would not be worth a snap of the fingers."

Captain Quinox of the princess' bodyguard, accompanied by a half dozen of his men, rode up to the prison gates about 2 o'clock and was promptly admitted. The young captain was in sore distress.

"The Duke of Mizrox has sworn that you are the murderer, Mr. Lorry, and stakes his life," said he after greetings. "Her highness has just placed in my hands an order for your arrest as the assassin of Prince Lorenz."

Lorry turned as pale as death. "You—you don't mean to say that she has signed a warrant—that she believes me guilty?" he cried, aghast.

"She has signed the warrant, but very much against her inclination. Count Halfont informed me that she pleaded and argued with the duke for hours, seeking to avert the act which is bound to give pain to all of us. He was obdurate and threatened to carry complaint to Bolaz, who would instantly demand satisfaction. As the duke is willing to die if you are proved innocent, there was no other course left for her than to dictate and sign this royal decree. Captain Dangloss, I am

imprisoned to keep you here."

"But I'll have to stay here too. If I go outside these walls, I'll be killed like a dog," protested Harry.

"You are to have a guard of six men while you are in Edelweiss, Mr. Anguish. Those are the instructions of the princess. I do not believe the secondaries—I mean the Axphain nobles—will molest you if you do not cross them. When you are ready to go to your hotel, I will accompany you."

Half an hour later Lorry was in a cell from which there could be no escape, while Anguish was riding toward the hotel, surrounded by Graustark soldiers. He had sworn to his friend that he would unearth the murderer if it lay within the power of man. Captain Dangloss heard the oath and smiled sadly.

At the castle there were depression and relief, grief and joy. The royal family, the nobility, even the servants, soldiers and attendants, rejoiced in the stroke that had saved the princess from a fate worse than death. There were, of course, serious complications for the future, involving ugly conditions that were bound to force themselves upon the land. The dead man's father would demand the life of his murderer. If not Lorry, who?

In the privacy of her room the stricken princess collapsed from the effects of the ordeal. Her poor brain had striven in vain to invent means by which she might save the man she loved. She had surrendered to the inevitable because there was justice in the claims of the inexorable duke and his vindictive friends. She signed the decree as if in a dream, a nightmare, with trembling hand and broken heart. His death warrant! And yet, like all others, she believed him guilty—guilty for her sake!

Mizrox and his friends departed in triumph, revenge written on every face.

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one is the warrant for Mr. Lorry's arrest, the other orders you to assume charge of him and to place him in confinement until the day of trial."

While Quinox was making this statement the accused stood with bowed head and throbbed heart. He did not see the captain's hand tremble as he passed the documents to Dangloss, nor did he hear the unhappy sigh that came from the latter's lips. Anguish, fiery and impulsive, was not to be subdued.

"Is there no warrant for my arrest?" he demanded.

"There is not. You are at liberty to go, sir," responded Quinox.

"I'd like to know why there isn't! I am just as guilty as Lorry."

"The duke charges the crime to but one of you. Baron Dangloss, will you read the warrant?"

The old chief read the decree of the princess slowly and impressively. It was as follows:

Just Duke of Mizrox, before his God and on his life, swears that Grenfall Lorry did foully, maliciously and designedly slay Lorenz, prince of Axphain, on the 20th day of October, in the year of our Lord 189—, and in the city of Edelweiss, Graustark. It is therefore my decree that Grenfall Lorry be declared murderer of Lorenz, prince of Axphain, until he be proved innocent, in which instance his accuser, Jacot, duke of Mizrox, shall forfeit his life, according to the law of this land providing penalty for false witness, and by which he himself has sworn to abide faithfully.

Signed, YETIVE.

There was silence for some moments, broken by the dreary tones of the accused.

"What chance have I to prove my innocence?" he asked hopelessly.

"The same opportunity that he has to prove your guilt. The duke must, according to our law, prove you guilty beyond all doubt," spoke the young captain.

"When am I to be tried?"

"Here is my order from the princess," said Dangloss, glancing over the other paper. "It says that I am to confine you securely and to produce you before the tribunal on the 26th day of October."

"A week! That is a long time," said Lorry. "May I have permission to see the signature affixed to those papers?"

Dangloss handed them to him. He glanced at the name he loved, written by the hand he had kissed, now signing away his life, perhaps. A mist came over his eyes, and a strange joy filled his soul. The hand that signed the name had trembled in doing so—had trembled pitifully. The heart had not guided the fingers. "I am your prisoner, Captain Dangloss. Do with me as you will," he said simply.

"I regret that I am obliged to place you in a cell, sir, and under guard. Believe me, I am sorry this happened. I am your friend," said the old man gloomily.

"And I?" cried Quinox.

"But what is to become of me?" cried poor Anguish, half in tears. "I won't leave you, Gren. It's an infernal outrage!"

"Be cool, Harry, and it will come out right. He has no proof, you know," said the other, wringing his friend's hand.

"But I'll have to stay here too. If I go outside these walls, I'll be killed like a dog," protested Harry.

"You are to have a guard of six men while you are in Edelweiss, Mr. Anguish. Those are the instructions of the princess. I do not believe the secondaries—I mean the Axphain nobles—will molest you if you do not cross them. When you are ready to go to your hotel, I will accompany you."

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She walked stately, numbly, to her room, assisted by her uncle, the count. Without observing her aunt or the Countess Dagmar, she staggered to the window and looked below. The Axphainians were crossing the parade ground jubilantly. Then came the clatter of a horse's hoof, and Captain Quinox, with the fatal papers in his possession, galloped down the avenue. She clutched the curtains distractedly and, leaning far forward, cried from the open window:

"Quinox! Quinox! Come back! I forbid—I forbid! Destroy those papers, Quinox!"

But Quinox heard not the pitiful wall. Seeing him disappear down the avenue, she threw her hands to her head and sank back with a moan, fainting. Count Halfont caught her in his arms. It was nightfall before she was fully revived. The faithful young countess clung to her caressingly, lovingly, uttering words of consolation until long after the shades of night had dropped. They were alone in the princess' boudoir, seated together upon the divan, the tired head of the one resting wearily against the shoulder of the other. Wide and dark and troubled were the eyes of the ruler of Graustark.

An attendant appeared and announced the arrival of one of the American gentlemen, who insisted on seeing her royal highness. The card on the tray bore the name of Harry Anguish. At once the princess was a-dutter with eagerness and excitement.

"Anguish! Show him to this room quickly! Oh, Dagmar, he brings word from him! He comes from him! Why is he so slow? Ah, I cannot wait!"

Far from being slow, Anguish was exceedingly swift in approaching the room to which he feared admittance might be denied.

"Tell me! What is it?" she cried as he stopped in the center of the room and glared at her.

"I don't care whether you like it, and it doesn't matter if you are a princess," he exploded, "there are a few things I'm going to say to you. First, I want to know what kind of a woman you are to throw into prison a man like—like—oh, it drives me crazy to think of it! I don't care if you are insulted. He's a friend of mine, and he is no more guilty than you are, and I want to know what you mean by ordering his arrest."

Her lips parted as if to speak, her face grew deathly pale, her fingers clutched the edge of the divan. She stared at him piteously, unable to move, to speak. Then the blue eyes filled with tears, a sob came to her lips, and her tortured heart made a last brave effort at defense.

"I—I—Mr. Anguish, you wrong me—I—I—"

She tried to whisper through the closed throat and stiffened lips. Words failed her, but she pleaded with those wet, imploring eyes. His heart melted, his anger was swept away in a twinkling. He saw that he had wounded her most unjustly.

"You brute!" hissed the countess, with flashing, indignant eyes, throwing her arms about the princess and drawing her head to her breast.

"Forgive me," he cried, sinking to his knee before the princess, shame and contrition in his face. "I have been half mad this whole day, and I have thought harshly of you. I now

see that you are suffering more intensely than I. I love Lorry, and that is my only excuse. He is being foully wronged, your highness, foully wronged."

"I deserve your contempt after all. Whether he be guilty or innocent, I should have refused to sign the decree. It is too late now. I have signed away something that is very dear to me—his life. You are his friend and mine. Can you tell me what he thinks of me—what he says—how he feels?" She asked the triple question breathlessly.

"He believes you were forced into the act, and said as much to me. As to how he feels, I can only ask how you would feel if you were in his place, innocent and yet almost sure of conviction. These friends of Axphain will resort to any subterfuge now that one of their number has staked his life. Mark my word, some one will deliberately swear that he saw Grenfall Lorry strike the blow, and that will be as villainous a lie as man ever told. What I am here for, your highness, is to ask if that decree cannot be withdrawn."

"Alas, it cannot! I would gladly order his release if I could, but you can see what that would mean to us—a war, Mr. Anguish," she sighed miserably.

"But you will not see an innocent man condemned?" cried he, again indignant.

"I have only your statement for that, sir. If you will pardon me, I hope from the bottom of my heart that he did not murder the prince after being honorably challenged."

"He is no coward!" thundered Anguish, startling both women with his vehemence. "I say he did not kill the prince, but I'll stake my life he would have done so had they met this morning."

"He may be able to clear himself," suggested the countess nervously.

"And he may not; so there you have it. What chance have two Americans over here with everybody against us?"

"Stop! You shall not say that! He shall have full justice at any cost, and there is one here who is not against him!" cried the princess, with flashing eyes.

"I am aware that everybody admires him because he has done Graustark a service in ridding it of something obnoxious—a prospective husband. But that does not get him out of jail."

"You are unkind again," said the princess slowly. "I chose my husband, and you assume much when you intimate that I am glad because he was murdered."

"Do not be angry," cried the countess impatiently. "We all regret what has happened, and I, for one, hope that Mr. Lorry may escape from the tower and laugh forevermore at his pursuers. If he could only dig his way out!"

The princess shot a startled look toward the speaker as a new thought entered her wearied brain. A short, involuntary gasp told that it had lodged and would grow. She laughed at the idea of an escape from the tower, but as she laughed a tiny spot of red began to spread upon her cheek and her eyes glistened strangely.

Anguish remained with them for half an hour. When he left the castle, it was with a more hopeful feeling in his breast. In the princess' boudoir late that night two girls in loose silken gowns sat before a low fire and talked of something that caused the countess to tremble with excitement when first her pink cheeked sovereign mentioned it in confidence.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE FLIGHT AT MIDNIGHT.

LORRY'S cell was as comfortable as a cell could be made through the efforts of a kindly jailer and a sympathetic chief of police. It was not located in the dungeon, but high in the tower, a little rock bound room, with a single barred window far above the floor. There was a bed of iron, upon which had been placed a clean mattress, and there was a little chair. The next day after his arrest a comfortable armchair replaced the latter. A table, a lamp, some books, flowers, a bottle of wine and some fruit found their way to his lonely apartment, whoever may have sent them. Harry Anguish was admitted to the cell during the afternoon.

He reported that most of the Axphain contingent was still in town. A portion had hurried home, carrying the news to the old prince, instructed by the aggressive Mizrox to fetch him forthwith to Edelweiss, where his august presence was necessary before the 26th. The princess, so Harry informed the prisoner, sent sincere expressions of sympathy and the hope that all would end well with him.

Late in the evening, as Lorry was lying on his bed, staring at the shadowy ceiling and puzzling his brain with most oppressive uncertainties, the rattle of keys in the lock announced the approach of visitors. The door swung open, and through the grate he saw Dangloss and Quinox. The latter wore a long military rain coat and had just come in from a drenching downpour. Lorry's reverie had been so deep that he had not heard the thunder nor the howling of the winds. Springing to his feet, he advanced quickly to the grated door.

"Captain Quinox brings a private message from the princess," said the chief, the words scarcely more than whispered. It was plain that the message was important and of a secret nature. Quinox looked up and down the corridor and stairway before thrusting the tiny note through the bars. It was grasped eagerly, and trembling fingers broke the seal. Bending near the light, he read the lines, his vision blurred, his heart throbbing so fiercely that the blood seemed to be drenching out other sounds for all time to come. In the dim corridor stood the two men, watching him with bated breath and guilty, quaking nerves.

"Oh!" gasped Lorry, kissing the missive insanely as his greedy eyes careened through the last line. There was no signature, but in every word he saw her face! felt the touch of her dear hand, heard her timid heart beating for him—from him alone. Rapture thrilled him from head to foot, the delicious rapture of love. He could not speak, so overpowering was the joy, the surprise, the awakening.

"Obey!" whispered Quinox, his face aglow with pleasure, his finger quivering as he pointed commandingly toward the letter.

"Obey what?" asked Lorry dully.

"The last line!"

He hastily reread the last line and then deliberately held the precious missive over the lamp until it ignited. He would have given all he possessed to have preserved it. But the last line commanded, "Burn this at once and in the presence of the bearer."

"There!" he said regretfully as he crumpled the charred remnants between his fingers and turned to the silent watchers.

"Her crime goes up in smoke," muttered Dangloss sentimentally.

"The princess commits no crime," retorted Quinox angrily, "when she trusts four honest men."

"Where is she?" whispered the prisoner, with thrumming ears.

"Where all good women should be at 9 o'clock—in bed," replied Dangloss shortly. "But will you obey her command?"

"So she commands me to escape!" said Lorry, smiling. "I dare not disobey my sovereign, I suppose."

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